



February 27, 2023

Senator Hartley, Representative Gibson, and Connecticut General Assembly members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Erin Perpetua, President of School Nutrition Association of Connecticut (SNACT), which is the professional organization representing Connecticut's school nutrition professionals. I am also the Food Service Director for Norwich Public Schools who resides in Norwich, Connecticut. I am testifying on behalf of SNACT on **H.B. No. 6659 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

Connecticut's school nutrition professionals have made great strides in bringing fresh local food into our school cafeterias and the CT Kids Grant Program has greatly advanced these efforts. We urge you to add funding for the CT Grown for CT Kids Grants Program in the 2024-2025 budget with an appropriation of 1 (one) million dollars annually.

Having the focus towards fresh, locally grown foods as part of their school meals is a great benefit to students. It highlights our nutritious local foods to the menu, giving students the opportunity to learn about local agriculture, try new fruits and vegetables and bring that information back home to their families!

Furthermore the benefit to our local economy by using Farm to School. We are investing our dollars into local, typically family owned farms. This is an investment in not only our students but for the entire community.

We all know the benefits of local - this grant program gives Connecticut school districts a chance to be able to start and/or enhance their current programs. The grants supplied by this program give access to local school districts that may not have adequate funding to support a farm to school program in their district. It is often the stepping stone for a district to build or expand their program from being able to provide local farm produce for one school, to many schools.

As a school district that has received Farm to School grants in the past, these grants have enabled my district to expand to the point, prior to COVID, we were providing all of our school with locally grown broccoli, summer squash, corn, beets, winter squash, green/purple/yellow beans for year round use. We started off very small and were able to expand. We were able to invest our money in multiple local farms rather than buying products that were grown in other parts of the country. It gave us the opportunity to employ and invest in our employees to earn

extra money processing these items knowing that their students would be the ones eating it. I have seen a pride come from these staff members knowing that they are part of the process and they are giving their children the best products! We were able to educate our students about where their food comes from. I have actually had students say that they never knew that corn comes on a cob - they only knew it in canned form. These types of grants have allowed my program to be on the cover of CT Grown magazine which highlighted what these types of programs can become with just a little help.

The USDA requires that all school programs use US agricultural products and you can't get any closer than what is grown in our neighborhood, town or state. This is a win-win investment in our students, our farms and our communities! We hope you see the local benefit in supporting funding for this program.

Thank you,

Erin Perpetua
SNACT President 2022-2023
Director of Food Services
Norwich Public Schools